

*Case Study*  
*The Making of Nepal's Community Video Letter:  
Presenting a Picture from the Village to Environmental Policy Makers*

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**GreenCOM  
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## Case Study

### ***The Making of Nepal's Community Video Letter: Presenting a Picture from the Village to Environmental Policy Makers***

*Kedar Sharma*

#### **Executive Summary**

One of the strategies that GreenCOM has used to connect villages to their national centers has been the Community Video Letter. In Nepal, for instance, where the terrain conspires with underdevelopment to cut off villages, GreenCOM was asked by USAID to work with the government on forestry issues. Nepalese law now mandates the transfer of control of national forests to local community-forest-user groups. In fact, many of these community-controlled forests have now recovered sufficiently from deforestation and are currently able to supply their user groups with more forest products. But like all dynamic development situations, the reality is quite complex. People at the center who make policy need to understand the impact of their decisions on people in the villages who are seeking to carry out that policy.

Therefore, in anticipation of the Annual Community Forestry Forum of policy makers in Kathmandu in March 1998, GreenCOM sent a two-person team to Uchanimbu, a hill-country village in the Mid-West Development Region, to chronicle the new forestry policy in action, by creating a Community Video Letter.

During several weeks, Kedar Sharma, a community video consultant to GreenCOM, and Carina Frantz, a GreenCOM anthropologist, trained a socially diverse group from the CFUG to document their concerns about corruption, forest boundaries and soil erosion. With great sensitivity, they taught Untouchables, Tharu, Bhramins, and Nepalis of both sexes and various political leanings every aspect of video production **S** from holding the camera to script writing and directing. Kedar and Carina write of the villagers first encounters with the video camera. They were all familiar with still cameras, but not yet with video cameras. Their still-camera experience **S** evidently posing for portraits **S** meant that they became very formal and stiff whenever they were in front of the video camera. Some of them even came in special clothing, which they generally do not wear in the village! But eventually, they relaxed, faced the camera, and spoke from their hearts.

Two community-forestry members, including one Nepali woman and one Tharu man, traveled to Kathmandu to edit the video letter and present it to the Forum. The forum audience viewed their final product, which was packed with detail **S** the good and the not-so-good **S** about forest use and policy in Nepal. The villagers called for action. The Forum got the message.

The result was a renewed awareness among Forum participants of the impact of their policy and a new commitment to dialogue with Nepalese villagers who now hold the key to the country's forests.

## Introduction

Nepal's population has risen to the point where the subsistence economy can no longer provide for all its people's needs. Government forests have been over-used and open pasture lands over-grazed, resulting in a decrease in productivity and degradation of the landscape. With limited opportunities for increasing off-farm employment, USAID/Nepal's Environment and Forest Enterprise Activity (EFEA) seeks to raise household incomes by increasing agricultural and natural resource productivity and by encouraging value-added processing of natural resource products.

Agriculture is the foundation of Nepal's rural economy, and forest and farm production are closely linked. Forests provide fuelwood for cooking and construction materials for building homes and farm tools. Fodder and leaf litter gathered from the forests are composted with animal dung making a major source of fertilizer for crops. So increasing agricultural productivity will require increasing nutrient inputs, and this can only be done with a parallel increase in the productivity of Nepal's forests and pastures.

The key to reversing a decline in agricultural and forestry productivity is to increase local control over the management of natural resources. Nepal's government has provided an opportunity for increased local control of natural resources through policy reform and enabling legislation. Policies, laws, and procedures now exist for transferring management control of national forests to local community-forest-user groups (CFUGs). In fact, many CFUG-protected forests have recovered sufficiently from deforestation and are currently able to supply their user groups with more forest products.

The Environmental Education and Communication (GreenCOM) Project is jointly funded and managed by the Center for Environment, Center for Human Capacity Development, and Office for Women in Development of the Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research of the United States Agency for International Development and by USAID Missions at collaborating sites. GreenCOM was initiated in 1993 to support environmentally sound policies and practices in developing countries through the application of education and communication methods. The GreenCOM Project worked in Nepal from November 1996 until September 1998, to provide support EFEA. Specifically, this meant to:

1. enhance community understanding of the new forest policy/legislation and the community's role in it;
2. stimulate the process of social discourse on opportunities created by the new policy; and
3. support forestry/conservation extension work of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MOFSC) Departments of Forests (DOF), Soil Conservation (DSCO), National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and non-government organizations who are partners in the project.

Among the several activities undertaken by GreenCOM in Nepal, one of the most exciting was the creation of a Community Video Letter as a way to foster an ongoing "bottom-up" dialogue involving **community-forest-user groups (CFUGs)** from Nepal's rural areas and regional and national

environmental policymakers **S** precisely to "stimulate the process of social discourse on opportunities created by the new policy."

**A Community Video Letter (CVL)** is a communication tool used to help people express themselves in a video format. As a letter, it can be written (prepared) by a person or group or a community. In particular, in the context of development communication, the CVL has proved to be an effective way to articulate issues related to distant and isolated communities to the attention of concerned central or regional authorities. CVLs have both picture and sound, making for vivid presentations, suitable for both literates and illiterates. In Nepal, with its high rate of illiteracy among the rural population, GreenCOM turned to the CVL to communicate between the target populations of development programs and the people who develop and implement such programs.

In the preparation of a CVL, the community takes the lead role in deciding on selection of subject, its treatment, and the camera work. They are trained in using equipment and facilitated in final editing. The role of the subject matter specialist **S** an outsider **S** is limited to that of facilitator. The facilitator's key role is to ensure that the CVL truly is a reflection of the community's viewpoint.

This report describes the process and result of the GreenCOM-facilitated CVL in Nepal.

### **The village**

In concert with EFEA, the GreenCOM Project focused on the Mid-Western Development Region whose main city is Tulsipur, west of the capital Kathmandu. Within this region, the Dang district, in the hills, was one of those with the longest and some of the most successful experience with community-forest-users groups. Within this district, GreenCOM sought out the particular CFUG for the community video letter according to these specific criteria:

- One of the oldest CFUGs in the district (the one that has gone through the full series of activities, with a wide range of experience and a lengthy process of learning);
- A CFUG where some tangible benefits have been realized by the CFUG members;
- A CFUG that has already received a wide range of technical inputs in activities **S** for example as soil conservation training, non-formal education, income-generating activities, the empowerment of women, and so on;
- A CFUG with representatives able to articulate their needs and state their case with arguments based in experience;
- A CFUG with diverse ethnic groups.

Based on these, the regional EFEA coordinator and several district forestry officers provided GreenCOM with a short list of eleven CFUGs. GreenCOM then visited all eleven, and chose Uchanimbu as the most suitable. Besides meeting our criteria, Uchanimbu, in the Deokhuri Valley, had better weather to allow for our solar equipment and the CFUG members were interested in working with us over the six weeks that would be involved.

The Uchanimbu community-forest-users group has grown from 133 households when this forest was first registered as a CFUG in 1991, to 157 today. The forest area itself, 53 hectares in the beginning, was increased to approximately 400 hectares after the district forest office added a huge area of the degraded Siwalik forest in the Uchanimbu CFUG's area upon the request of the CFUG. However, the CFUG members do not know yet how much of the Siwalik forest area has actually been added because they have not received the new action plan with the formal declaration of the CFUG area and the map.

Uchanimbu is nine kilometers west from the closest market town, which is on the east-west national highway. Uchanimbu is bordered on the South by the Rapti River, on the East by the Kari River, on the North by the Siwalik Hills, and on the West by the Tenghniha River.

Thirty years ago, the village was surrounded by rich natural forest, but when construction began on the national highway, the forest started to be cleared rapidly. One of the most valuable trees of the region, Khayar, came close to extinction; this tree was in high demand from the Kattha industries, owned by some influential people. In addition to the Kattha industries, rapid

## VILLAGE DYNAMICS

Villages in Nepal are the blend of different caste and ethnic groups; each individual's relationships within a group and with other groups varies.

First, try to understand the different types of relationships that exist among groups and individuals in the village. (*Examples are sprinkled through this case study.*) This process involves some subtle skills for learning about people. Some ways to do this are:

1. Home visits: Generally people are happy if you visit them. You can informally drop in on people at home either for morning tea or evening chat. People automatically start to tell their stories. Some of the villagers are more informed and talkative than others. You may prefer to be with the informed and talkative people. But keep this activity mostly personal and informal.
2. Story telling: Story telling is one of the best ways of giving to or generating information from people. A simple story about yourself generally encourages people to tell their stories to you.
3. Look and Verify: Be aware that some of the stories that you hear may have some elements of exaggeration or imagination. You should carefully watch how people behave, as against how they say they behave. As an outsider, you may be told only nice things or the things that they would like you to believe. Keep your eyes and ears open to see relationships between what you are told and what you observe. Of course, you are looking only for information that you think is valuable to the CVL.

population growth due to heavy migration from the hills was another of the reasons for the degradation of the area's forest.

In 1980, the forest of Uchanimbu was registered as *Panchayati Ban*, the prototype of the present-day community forest, but owned by the village government. In 1991, after the present community forestry legislation was enacted, this forest was registered as a community forest and the local people were given the rights to, and responsibility for, the forest. It was then that people started to protect their forest with a very high degree of commitment. They proposed to the District Forestry Officer that they wanted to take out the stumps of Khayar trees as an income-generating activity, and after approval of their action plan, they sold many of the useless stumps and earned a good income for the CFUG. With that money, they constructed a community house and two bus-stop shelters, and contributed RS. 30,001 for the establishment of a local school.

The majority of the local residents in this area are Tharus, an indigenous people. Among the immigrants, in descending order of their number, there are Brahmins, Chhetri, Yogis, Magars, and low-caste people.

Except in a certain part of the forest which was declared “protected area” from the beginning, there is a heavy grazing problem in the Uchanimbu forest. Local farmers need many oxen to work the land, and since these animals could not be fed in their stalls easily, grazing land is a critical need for the local farmers.

Although the village is surrounded by the Rapti, Kari, and Tenghniha Rivers and numerous smaller streams, there is now a problem of irrigation. Until a few years ago, there was an irrigation system that provided an adequate water supply to the village, but flood waters broke that system, and villagers lack resources to repair it by themselves. Because the present Home Minister comes from an adjacent village, the people of Uchanimbu have a feeling that, instead of receiving any help, they are in fact somehow being exploited by the influence of the Minister, his villagers, and relatives. They cite the example of Kari Sota stream, which is completely used by the people from Minister's village. Similarly, the electric line passes through their village to the Minister's village S but without lighting Uchanimbu houses.

### **GreenCOM arrives in Uchanimbu**

The GreenCOM team S myself, the facilitator, and Carina Frantz, an anthropologist S arrived in the village on November 27, 1997. The CFUG executive committee members were expecting us. They had planned to board us in the CFUG meeting house right on the highway, but we did not find that appropriate, mainly because of the highway noise. So we chose an ashram, a house owned by a religious organization, which was vacant and set apart on a large common ground, and were authorized to stay there by its guard.

That first evening, we held a small, informal meeting with the CFUG representatives. There I explained more about CVLs, especially for those who were hearing about CVLs for the first time. We also discussed how we might select participants for the CVL and drew up a tentative plan for the

coming weeks. That evening we scheduled a formal meeting of entire CFUG for the next day. At the appointed time, CFUG members gathered in front of the CFUG meeting house. The Ranger, CARE/Nepal's Community Forest Extensionist (CFE), the ward chairperson, local teachers, CFUG executive members, and community forest users of both sexes were there. Out of 31 participants, there were only eight women.

After a brief introduction about EFEA and GreenCOM, we explained what a Community Video Letter is, and requested them to participate voluntarily in the production of a CVL for their CFUG. Generally, it is rare in the Nepali villages for people to volunteer for a new project, and this proved to be no exception. However, the CFUG committee members discussed the matter among themselves for some time, and, finally, the CFUG chairperson came out with a list of 15 "volunteer" participants consisting of eight women and seven men for the CVL.

Trying to keep to our democratic norms, we asked "volunteers" to withdraw their names if they wanted to. But the CFUG chairperson intervened. "No, we have already discussed this matter with them and this list of participants has been prepared with their consent. However, if you ask them, many people, especially those participating in such activities for the first time, might take their names back." He also assured me that they had selected a very good team, including fair proportions of indigenous people, the ethnic communities, high castes, low castes, and women. The roster of the CVL team is listed here:

No.	Name	Sex	Caste
1	Laxmi Chaudhari	F	Tharu
2	Man Kumari Chaudhari	F	Tharu
3	Devi Chaudhari	F	Tharu
4	Hari Chaudhari	M	Tharu
5	Farharu Chaudhari	M	Tharu
6	Jagat Prasad Chaudhari	M	Tharu
7	Radha K.C.	F	Chhetri
8	Sabitra Gharti	F	Magar
9	Laxmi Yogi	F	Yogi
10	Kaushalya Bhattarai	F	Brahmin
11	Bishnu Pokhrel	F	Brahmin
12	Man Bahadur Batha	M	Magar (Landless)
13	Khageshwar Sharma	M	Brahmin
14	Liladhar Nepali	M	Low caste
15	Sharad Pokhrel	M	Brahmin

### Introducing Villagers to Video



On the same day that we formed this CVL team, we started mobile-video shows in the village. About 300 people came and watched a telefilm, *Chetana*, and then a volume of the *Ankhihyal* video magazine with material on stall-feeding.

*Radha and Kaushalya were two candidates for the women's quota in the Village Development Committee (VDC) ward committee election. Kaushalya won the election. After the election, they stopped talking to each other. There are many election winners in the village, but, since they were not direct opponents, they do not have any personal grievances against each other. Therefore, the quota for women members in the VDC executive committee actually created a rift between two women whereas this provision was supposed to enable women to help each other. When these leading women do not talk with each other, some of their female supporters also got divided in favor of one or the other.*

We tried to use this opportunity of the mobile-video show to explain CVL to the larger audience. We emphasized why we were there and how the video letter was different from the video materials produced in conventional ways. We explained that the CFUG participants themselves would be operating the camera, deciding about which issues to address, and articulating the way issues were addressed. We also made clear that our role would be limited, that we were only facilitators of the process. Our role would be limited to helping them on the use of the camera and on techniques for telling their story. We told them that their audience would be forestry policymakers, and that the CVL would be a strong channel to use in

reaching those faraway officials.

However, we immediately realized that a crowd of 300 people who had turned out to watch a video show **S** not to hear a speech **S** was not an appropriate place to describe the video letter.

Interestingly people in our CFUG were thinking about organizing a picnic, but some influential male members of our CFUG wanted to organize men-only picnic. Our response to this was that if they would organize a picnic excluding women members of the community, we would not participate in that.

### **The Process of Developing the Community Video Letter**

**November 30th** was our first day with the CVL group. To develop an informal and open relationship with the participants, we began by introducing ourselves, telling a few things about our families. This broke the ice, and helped participants to introduce themselves in detail.

After these introductions, we explained more about CVLs. We compared a video letter to a conventional video, like a letter written personally as opposed to a story about that person written by someone else. Then we did a short exercise on letter writing. At the end of this exercise, we were confident that the participants were much clearer about what they were going to do in the next several weeks.

Letter writing was followed by a hands-on camera session. The participants looked through the viewfinder and practiced holding the camera properly. We recorded some of the participants speaking and then asked them to speak on camera about anything they would like.

Then we recorded our first video productions, public service announcements (PSA) for polio vaccination day, by two of the participants, Radha K.C. and Kaushalya Bhattarai, in Tharu and Nepali languages respectively.

The hands-on exercises **S** looking through the viewfinder and holding the camera properly **S** went together with story telling. Participants told many stories related to the forest, which on the one hand helped them to open up and on the other hand gave us a good chance to understand their forestry-related issues. As we concluded the session, we showed them the photographs from our previous visit to their village. We had pictures of all of the eight women and three out of seven men were present in the meeting.

*Khageshwor and Tara have disputes over a piece of land. Almost all villagers think that Khageshwor is not a nice person as he always involved in some disputes and takes these village disputes to the government court. In the entire village, it is only Radha's family that is friendly with Khageshwor. One of the reasons for this tie is that Radha lost an election against Tara's wife Kaushalya. Thus an enemy of an enemy becomes a friend of Khageshwor.*

In evening, we had another mobile-video show, this time with some local footage, including the local public service announcements we had just made.

### **December 1st**

The next day started with personal story telling. Many participants told very personal stories about their family and life, and one more participant joined the group.

We realized that the group was too big to work all together and brought this up with the participants. With the group's consensus, we divided the participants into three sub-groups. While dividing the group, we tried to maintain gender balance and group the participants in a way so that they would feel comfortable to work and deal with each other.

### **December 2nd and 3rd**

So we started working with three separate groups. Each of the groups was given approximately two hours of time. Over these two days, the groups practiced the basics of camera technique and shot different activities of their own. Encouraged by previous experience, Radha did another PSA on the importance of toilet construction and use, and about the “Best Toilet Award,” established by us on the spot!

All of the participants were familiar with still cameras, but not yet with video cameras. Their still-camera experience **S** evidently posing for portraits **S** meant that they became very formal and stiff

whenever they were in front of the video camera. Some of them even came in special clothing, which they generally do not wear in the village!

On December 3rd, one of the groups tried to prepare a short skit, but we advised them to concentrate more on real stories, since we were preparing a video letter to the policy makers and they would take the real stories more seriously.

Today we also realized that to work with all three groups everyday was not very practical, due to the work load and time division. Therefore, we decided that there would be only one group per day from now on.

We were going through the process of CVL making in a very informal way. There was group division, but it was always very flexible and people could join another group if their own group's schedule was not convenient for them. Since we were not providing any compensation, we could not ask them to give up any of their household chores to give priority to the CVL. However, we found that this informal approach and flexible timing did in fact make it easier for the team members to participate effectively in the process.

#### **December 4th - 9<sup>th</sup>**

Over these six days, all groups met separately and had more practice in basic camera techniques and in speaking-into-the-camera practice. They were good story-tellers when the camera was off, even when practicing, but not in front of a live camera. We had to make them comfortable **S** as if speaking with the camera **S** so we started to have one session every day of story telling to the camera. This aspect of the CVL needed a lot of attention.

On December 6th, one of the participants, Hari Chaudhari, left the group because he got a job as a taxi driver in the nearby town. Since there were still 13 participants and the possibility that someone might drop out had been considered from the beginning, it was not that important to have someone to replace him. However, we had noticed a man, Khushiram Chaudhari, for some days who

*Khageshwor's daughter -in-law Bishnu lives in a separate house with her two young daughters. Her husband works 175 kilometers away from home and visits the village only once in a while. Bishnu complains that her parents-in-law have not stopped harassing her even after she moved into this separate house. When she joined the Community Video Letter group, her mother-in-law visited her, and yelled at her for wearing bright clothes, "having make-up like a prostitute," and ordered her to leave the group. But she continued to be an active CVL group member after the CVL facilitator encouraged her to continue and promised to talk to her husband if needed. Their parents are more unhappy with them because they are friends of Tara with whom the parents have sour relations.*

was not in our group but just following us almost everyday, while we were having camera practice or story-telling sessions. So we proposed that he join the group and he happily agreed.

Beginning on December 7th, we started to film in sequence. We explained to the participants how a film is prepared, how different shots of different sizes are taken, and how they are assembled into a meaningful sequence. Participants first filmed a sequence of Polio Vaccination activities. The next day, another group went to the river and filmed a sequence about the broken irrigation system. We followed them, assisting with the camera work and with how to explain the issue in detail. This exercise was continued the next day with another group, which filmed sequences on potato harvesting and on children herding cattle. Then another group filmed a sequence on paddy harvesting.

*Padam Yogi, a local teacher, is one of the most influential villagers. In a land dispute between Khageshwor and Tara, he had been the witness against Khageshwor in the court. He is one of the advisors of the CFUG committee and plays a key role in the functioning of the CFUG. During the election of new executive members of the CFUG, he supported a new candidate, Narayan. In the VDC election he supported Kaushalya who is an enemy of Radha. Therefore, Radha, Khageshwor and the ex-chairman Lilamani are not happy with Padam Yogi. His wife, Laxmi, is one of the active CVL participants.*

December 9th was a cloudy and cold day, so we did not go out for filming. Instead, we started to review the footage. All of the participants came to our place at the ashram. We prepared tea for them and served it when all of them were together. In doing so, we had an ulterior motive: we wanted to see the response of the majority upper-caste participants towards Lila, who was from the lower, or untouchable, caste. Since the upper-caste people were not supposed to drink or eat with him. To our great surprise, no one objected, no one refused to drink, or showed any uncomfortable gesture. Later, we asked Faraharu whether they (the Tharu people) eat with the lower castes or not; he answered that they generally do not invite them inside their homes or eat with them, but do drink with them on occasion.

### **December 10th, 11th, and 12th**

December 10th was also a rainy day. So we postponed filming again, and spent the day with home visits and chats. We started finding participants getting more and more interested in the issues of community forestry. Even those participants, who were just showing their interest in fuelwood and fodder issues, also started to talk about serious forestry issues. Since Carina and I had to go to Kathmandu for about a week, we wanted to give them a task to focus more on the issues to be raised in the video letter. So, we asked them to discuss more and more about forestry and related issues and gave them notebooks and pens to write down anything they wanted the CVL to deal with on these subjects.

They followed this suggestion that very day, even before we left. We noticed that, in the discussion, each speaker was talking as if addressing me, using the language they would use in the

presence as an outsider. Therefore we urged them to be more confident about doing things on their own, and in their own language, as they would discuss matters among themselves.

We left for Kathmandu on December 12th due to urgent work there, and returned to the village on December 21st to continue the process.

December 22nd was our first day after the long gap. We were worried that the participants might not have been meeting with each other and discussing the issues in our absence. If the process had become discontinued, it would be very difficult for us to rebuild the whole thing. We visited every participant at home and offered them the *Prasad* (holly flowers, threads, and sweets) from Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu. They told us that except for one day they did not in fact meet each other regarding the video letter. However, we were convinced that the momentum was not broken.

Altogether, seven participants were present that day even though they all were very busy in their agricultural work. That morning we first went to the community house. One of our participants, Laxmi Yogi, is a volunteer in the family-planning clinic. She has to work with a health worker from the neighboring town, Lamahi, who was referred to as "Doctor" in the whole area. When we were there at the clinic doing our exercise, we stayed outside as always, so as not to interfere with what they were doing. One participant came out and reported to us that the health assistant was annoyed with the participants even though they had not disturbed anyone at all. So after they finished, we went inside to apologize for the trouble we made and to thank the health assistant for giving us a chance to film on his premises. He responded with a nice smile and said "no problem."

Participants were discussing many things regarding forest resources. Laxmi Chaudhari came up with the idea that the forest should be divided into different blocks and the users should use the blocks in rotation, an original and interesting idea. But when we asked her to tell that to the camera, she did not wish to do so. However the other participants liked her idea and used it in the video letter.

*Beju Chaudhari is a local faith healer from a neighboring village, but he has strong influence in the Uchanimbu village as well. To make use of this influence, he fought for the position of Ward Chairperson of Uchanimbu in the election. Villagers of Uchanimbu came together and defeated him in the election. Thus angered, Beju started creating unnecessary problems and disputes in Uchanimbu with the help of his friends in Uchanimbu. Because of his social and religious influence, very rarely would people dare to confront his ideas and opinion on matters related to the residents of Uchanimbu, though Mr. Beju himself is a non-resident of the village.*

On the 23th, one of the participants, Man Bahadur, said that there was a big problem of encroachment onto public land in the village. Even some of the members of our team had encroached onto public land and pasture. We visited one of the accused participants at home and

asked about the encroachment issue **S** without mentioning the previous discussion. Radha, one of the accused herself actually, was also excited about this particular issue. She affirmed that it was a problem of the community **S** but insisted that she was not one to cause it.

Most of the participants wanted to “write” something in the video letter about the problem of encroachment onto public land and about the landless people. We suggested that they do so without offending any of the group members. So that day, when we were ready to go filming, one of the participants, Khushiram, said that a farmer family in the nearby village was putting up fence on the public land to encroach there. All of the group agreed to film this event and so we went there. The man who was working on the fence was interviewed and his work was filmed. After some time, a group of forest guards came and destroyed the fence. They told us that the ranger sent them to see us and help us if needed.

The wife of one of the participants, Faraharu Chaudhari, was sick at this time. We went to visit them and advised them to take her to the health center in Lamahi.

*Dikpal Yogi is the chairperson from the neighboring CFUG. He is from the most influential family of his village. He and his family want to have their influence on the way the CVL is prepared. They try to be very close friends of the facilitator by inviting him for dinner and extending other such personal favors. One of the hidden agendas that he had was to request the CVL team to film a song by his brother and an interview of his father. One of the lessons to be learned from this case is that the people who may try to influence the process of CVL preparation may also come from the neighboring*

One of the influential persons of the neighboring village, Dikpal Yogi, said that the members from other CFUGs had learned about the CVL and were very interested in meeting our group, to tell their problems to the camera so that their message might reach Kathmandu. He added that he himself liked the idea and so had invited all the CFUG representatives from that area to his CFUG office **S** because that was near to the CFUG we were working. Even though that was not in our program, we welcomed the idea because this would also give us an opportunity to meet other CFUG members and understand their situation.

On December 24th, we left the group with the camera and went to Lamahi, the nearby market town, to phone the Kathmandu office. In Lamahi, we were told that the local ‘Doctor’

(who had been there in the family-planning clinic during our filming exercise) wanted to meet us, so we went to see him. We found that his main interest was to see the pictures of his health post that the CVL group took during the filming exercise. Video was very important for everyone and so were we!

In Lamahi, we heard the very sad news that the wife of one of our participants, Liladhar Nepali, had died suddenly while she was going to see the doctor for a minor headache. We went back to the village, where no one was working because of the death in the village. We went to Lila’s house to console him, though there was nothing to be said in words.

## **December 25th**

We were trying to pull together the forestry issues from last week but they were not very clear to us as yet. There were so many issues and they were so closely linked with each other. Therefore, it was difficult to finalize a list of issues to "write" on the CVL.

To help us think more clearly in this situation, we consulted the "Making Village Maps" section of the Community Video Guidelines. Since we were not experienced in exercises like map-making, we asked for the help of a forest officer, who was very experienced in the exercises like Participatory Rural Appraisal. He had promised to come and assist us in that particular exercise. We waited a few days for him, but when we realized that it was already getting late to do that exercise, we decided to facilitate that process ourselves, closely following the manual.

First, we explained to the participants what a map is and how a map helps to discuss the issues and to draw conclusions. Fairly promptly, the participants drew the border lines of the village, then plotted all the major land marks like rivers, highway, roads, fields, and forests. In short order, the map was completed by the CVL group.

After that, we resumed discussion about the issues, area by area, using the map. At the end of this exercise, the map was transcribed onto a large sheet of cardboard. All of the issues discussed and the names of respective agencies were noted down on another paper. When everything was prepared, most of the participants said that the exercise helped them to understand the issues more clearly than ever.

At the end of this exercise, we realized that the Map-Making should have been done earlier so that the participants and we could have had a clearer understanding of the situation from the very beginning.

## **December 26th**

A CFUG general meeting was called for the 26th in the community house. The whole meeting was dominated by the male members. Women were seated to one side and not addressed properly by the leaders. Only one woman, Radha K.C., who is our participant too, participated in the meeting by asking some questions.

One of our most regular participants, Man Bahadur Batha Magar, was absent from the group for a few days.

## **December 27th**

This day was set aside for the meeting of all CFUG representatives of the VDC, as per Dikpal Yogi's invitation. Representatives from almost all the CFUGs were present there. When the CVL participants told them that they were going to interview them on different issues like resource management and border disputes, one of the CFUG chairpersons showed his reluctance to being interviewed. We left the meeting place before they started interviewing people, again so as not to influence the process. Later the participants reported to us that this particular CFUG chairperson in fact became interested in speaking a few words to the camera when he saw others expressing their views this way.

The same day we went to another meeting, of the local agriculture-development committee. There were only one woman present, Kaushalya S again, one of our CVL participants.

This was another firewood-collection day. The villagers do not take any cutting tools to the forest. One of our participants, Khushiram Chaudhari, was breaking wood with his wife. Unfortunately, his wife was injured very badly; she was immediately taken to the health post in Lamahi.

That morning, we went to see Man Bahadur, who had not joined the group for few days, and found more bad news: Man Bahadur had a fever and bad cough and was very worried that his tuberculosis might have come back again.

There were some more home visits on this day.

A group of young villagers came together to organize a traditional dance and started their rehearsal. Though not expressed very explicitly, the main driving force behind this initiative by these young villagers was their strong desire to be in the video.

## **December 28th**

This day was scheduled for a review of the CVL work completed so far. We watched the footage and narrowed down the issues. Radha K.C. said that the exercise was interesting, but argued that it would be meaningful only if the issues included in the CVL were able to draw a response from policy makers.

Participants were coming up with more new ideas, views, and experiences. The illiterate member Laxmi Chaudhari, dictated her ideas to her son who wrote them down, a small but invaluable account of one woman's needs and aspirations.

Following the review, participants decided to re-do some of the footage. These were mainly the interviews disturbed by noise from a nearby highway.

That evening, a forest guard came and said that many trees had been cut in the forest. CFUG users talked and decided that a small group of CFUG executive members should go to the forest



to observe the loss and take necessary action. We was interested to see the interior of the forest and the decision-making process in this type of critical situation, and asked to go along.

### **December 29<sup>th</sup>**

Khushiram came to wake us up early in the morning, and we followed him to the community house where Padam Yogi and Tara Sharma were already waiting for us. A forest guard accompanied us. CVL participants had decided to film the loss of trees and the process of decision making against the person responsible. On this occasion, Khushiram handled the camera entirely by himself. First, the group went to a suspect's house in the nearby village. That person was also a forest guard from another CFUG. There they checked the newly cut logs; they asked the person where he brought them from and, when he could not answer to their satisfaction, the team members ordered him to be present at the community house at 4pm. We then went to the forest to see the actual damage. There we found more fallen branches and stumps of stolen trees. We could not even guess about the larger parts of the loss.

It was already 10:30 when we came back from the forest. We hurriedly had our breakfast and went to the meeting place. There we were told that most of the female participants would not be coming because they had been invited by a women's group from a neighboring village, Hasanapur, to attend the inauguration of a bus stop constructed by the community. We proposed that we all go there, and all agreed. Everyone in Hasanapur was very happy to see the “video group” there. Our participants filmed some of the scenes there and interviewed women who had worked to construct that small but very important structure. In the inauguration ceremony, one of our participants was asked to express her views. Another participant, Laxmi Yogi, arrived there a little late. However, she also wanted to express her views and register her name as one of the speakers. Most of the speakers gave their views about the role of women and how that could be improved. We also was asked to say a few words and used the opportunity to explain CVLs and our work in Uchanimbu.

After that, the participants had to return to the CFUG office for the meeting to discuss the wood stealing of the night before. As we were already late and there was no vehicle available there, we asked the police officer, who was also invited there, to provide his car to drop some of the participants and the CFUG chairperson (with the camera) at our community house. They filmed the interesting process and interviewed the persons who were punished. That was very interesting footage indeed.

### **December 30th and 31st**

These two days, participants filmed different footage as per the list they had prepared. They also interviewed some of the local people and watched the footage.

### **January 1st**

We celebrated the New Year's Day with a picnic, an open picnic, not restricted to men or women only. The CVL facilitator team also contributed to the cost of the picnic. Among CVL participants, Kaushalya could not come because she got an invitation for an emergency meeting from a nearby village. Khageshwar told us that one of his relatives had died recently so he should not join an entertaining program. Lila did not come because of his wife's death and Devi Chaudhari and Man Bahadur were also sick. But the rest of the participants and many other villagers joined the picnic, and it was a very good social event.

*Uchanimbu CFUG has the rule to pay allowances for the officers and rangers when they are officially invited to visit the CFUG. Most of the users in the CFUG do not like this and accuse the foresters for considering the CFUG as an extra source of income. They say that the ex-chairman of the CFUG established this rule as a way to get a permanent support for himself from the foresters.*

The picnic was almost over when suddenly a group of about 16 people from another village appeared in the community forest with head loads of twisted straw, one of the very important Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP). People from our CFUG caught and punished them mildly for not asking permission before harvesting the straw. In fact, those people had been the traditional users of that forest and were now excluded even as secondary users of the forest. Therefore, it was natural that they also got angry with the people from our village. Next day when some of our villagers went to their village for fishing, they reciprocated by confiscating our villagers' nets.

### **January 2nd**

Today a group of CVL participants went to Fachakpur to meet one of the oldest Tharu men. The old man had also been selected as a CVL participant but in fact he never joined the group. So we asked him why he agreed to be in the group and why he quit the group, not even coming for a single day. He told us that the cold made it very difficult for him to go out; therefore he could not come to join the group. Participants interviewed him and did some more filming and re-did two other interviews.

### **January 3rd**

Saturday, January 3rd, was another day for firewood collection. We did not have any footage of wood collection so far, so we decided to go to the forest and get lots of footage of the firewood collection. Most of the participants had to do many things that day. Therefore, Khageshwar was the only member to join us in the beginning. After a while, Sabitra and Faraharu joined us. We

met Laxmi Yogi in the forest. Faraharu and Sabitra did a brief interview with her. When we finished filming, Faraharu wanted to take his firewood home, so we left him in the forest and Sabitra, Khageshwar, and we started to walk towards the village.

For more than an hour we could not find a track leading to the village and were lost in the forest. Finally we saw a stream that we had seen during an earlier forest visit to see the damages done by poachers. We followed that track and came out of the forest.

After brunch, participants interviewed CFUG executive committee members and others on different issues. Most part of that day's interviews and footage was used in the video letter.

Laxmi and Mankumari Chaudhari, who were shy and hesitant to speak in front of the camera because of what they felt were their poor Nepali language skills, told us that they would in fact like to tell their message through the camera but not in front of everyone. They were given the camera and later we found that they spoke very well, and their views were included in the video letter as well.

Devi sent a message to her husband who works and lives in a nearby village school, but he did not come to see her. She was having tremendous pain and wanted to go to the hospital. She asked us for some money and a ride to the hospital. Kaushalya has also got sick because of the cold, a sore throat.

### **January 4th**

The VDC chairperson and a women's leader from the neighboring village came to talk on camera. We were hoping to get some interesting quotes from the VDC chairperson about local issues. The women's leader had delivered an interesting speech in Hasanapur at the bus-stop inauguration ceremony. The participants interviewed both of them, but they did not use the footage after editing.

### **January 5th**

We went to the top of the hills to see other side of the forest, which was being misused by the people of Masyaut Khola village. That was a very long walk, but was very informative and entertaining because of the sightseeing, forest fruits, and potluck lunch.

### **January 6th, 7th, 8th**

These were days for reviewing the footage, logging, and additional shooting as needed. We advised the participants to speak to the camera if they thought that was necessary. Most of them spoke up about their own priority issues.

## **January 9th**

During the CVL process in the village, we realized that the authorities needed to be questioned about several things **S** like why the action plan was not approved on time, what could be done by the DFO regarding public land encroachment, and so on. We sent a message to the DFO that we would like to meet and talk to him on January 9th. Accordingly, we went to Ghorahi and met him there. We then introduced the participants and explained about the process we were conducting. Participants interviewed the DFO and we went to interview the ranger who was at that time participating in a training. When both of them were interviewed, we went to Tulsipur, had lunch, and returned to the village.

With that, we had completed the production process of Community Video Letter.

## **Post production**

During our trip to Kathmandu in mid-December, we had a discussion with the GreenCOM Country Coordinator and the Technical Team Leader about bringing participants to Kathmandu for the editing process. When we went back to the village, we told the participants to select two representatives to go to Kathmandu. We agreed that one be male and one female, and one should be from the Tharu community and one from the hill community. Accordingly, they selected Laxmi Yogi, a woman from the hill community, and Khushiram Chaudhari from the Tharu community. Laxmi Yogi, Khushiram Chaudhari, and we arrived in Kathmandu on January 10th.

First, Laxmi Yogi and Khushiram Chaudhari prepared the tentative script. We assisted them in selecting places to insert the interviews. After that, they recorded narration, and then we started editing at Himalaya Films on January 12th.

January 14th was the biggest festival for Tharus, and also important for non-Tharus. We celebrated that festival in our home and continued with the process of editing. We completed narration recording and interview insertion accordingly. The content part of the CVL was completed on January 16th.

During the post-production process, we realized that we would need some more pictures to complete the film, and we needed to go back to Tulsipur for other official work. Because the start of the Forum had been delayed, Laxmi Yogi and Khushiram Chaudhari also needed to go back to their homes. So we went back to Dang together. We gave them the camera and asked them to take necessary shots. Before returning to Kathmandu, we took the camera and the new footage from them.

## **Postscript: The Forum**

*On March 17, 1998, GreenCOM organized and conducted a Community Forest Forum in March, 1998.*

*The CFUG representatives, Laxmi Yogi and Khushiram Chaudhari, arrived several days early in Kathmandu to work with GreenCOM on their Forum presentations. In particular, the Community Video Letter SA Letter from Uchanimbu S was edited with CFUG guidance in time for it to be shown at the Forum, providing a voice for CFUG representatives, women, and other groups not able to attend the meeting.*

*The purpose of the Forum was to establish dialogue and policy discussion between CFUGs and policy makers. Such a dialogue was to inform policy makers and EFEA activity managers about customers' perspectives on ways to implement forest policy, so that policy makers would be in a better position to determine additional policy reform or implementation. The Forum also sought to permit EFEA managers to assess customer satisfaction and field-level implementation more effectively.*

*From that point of view, the Forum was highly successful. The dialogue was catalyzed by the presentations by the CFUG-produced Community Video Letter, edited, according to their wishes, by GreenCOM. Straightforward discussion from CFUG members Laxmi Yogi and Khushiram Chaudhari followed the video letter. This was followed in turn by responses by the policy makers, who were well represented by Ministers, Secretaries, and others in the appropriate sectors.*

*Participants agreed that the presence of community members in the halls of government in Kathmandu was an emphatic statement on the need for dialogue, and that the video letter gave further voice to community members unable to be in the capital. Whatever else it may have accomplished, the Forum established the Community Video Letter as a credible link between rural Nepal and His Majesty's Government.*